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Letter dated 12 April 2011 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I have the honour to request that the report of the Western Asia regional preparatory meeting on the theme "Innovative approaches to reaching women, girls and the marginalized in the Arab region" be circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council for consideration at its 2011 substantive session, under item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda (see annex). The meeting was held on 9 December 2010, in Doha, in preparation for the annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council and in connection with the second World Innovation Summit for Education.

At the regional preparatory meeting, innovative approaches to the promotion of access to quality education for women, children and the marginalized were examined as a contribution to the theme of the 2011 annual ministerial review, "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education". Qatar believes that the report will constitute a valuable contribution to the discussions at the substantive session in Geneva in July 2011.

(*Signed*) Alya Ahmad **Al-Thani**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 12 April 2011 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

Report of the Western Asia regional preparatory meeting on education for the 2011 annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council

Summary

As part of the annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council, a regional preparatory meeting on the theme "Innovative approaches to reaching women, girls and the marginalized in the Arab region" was held in Doha on 9 December 2010 in preparation for the Council's 2011 annual ministerial review, which will focus on education. The meeting, held in the context of the second World Innovation Summit for Education (6-9 December 2010), was hosted by the Qatar Foundation and the Government of Qatar, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The meeting brought together a diverse group of regional stakeholders to discuss how innovative approaches, policies and targeted interventions can help reach women, girls and the marginalized. The meeting consisted of a panel discussion and a luncheon for ministers and heads of delegation from the Arab region attending the second World Innovation Summit for Education.

Key policy messages

The following key messages emerged from the discussion:

Progress in the Arab region on the education-related Millennium Development Goals and "Education for All" goals:

- Education is a key factor for sustained, inclusive and equitable growth and for achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Countries of the region have made noticeable strides towards achieving universal primary education. However, over the last two to three years, progress has levelled off. Current education policies in the region are not retaining those who are in school or reaching out-of-school children.
- Several Arab States have made great strides on the Education for All goals. Nevertheless, according to the Education for All Development Index, no country in the region* has achieved all of the Education for All goals.

Access to education

- It is necessary to provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for women, girls and marginalized groups by removing economic, social, religious and political barriers to education. This requires inclusive education systems as well as appropriate and targeted measures both outside and within the education sector.

- Governments need to ensure adequate national education budgets in order to address, inter alia, infrastructure, human resources, financial and administrative constraints. Adequate and predictable international support for education should be provided, including through new and voluntary approaches for education financing, South-South cooperation, triangular cooperation and other innovative partnerships.
- There is need to redouble efforts to provide access to education in emergency situations for all affected populations.

Education quality

- All stakeholders should work together to ensure quality education, reduce drop-out, repetition and failure rates by establishing child-friendly schools with relevant curricula and adopt active and cooperative pedagogic approaches and learning and teaching materials that are gender sensitive. The capabilities of information and communications technology should be harnessed, in particular for those outside the formal education system.
- There is urgent need to increase the number of teachers and enhance the quality of their teaching through comprehensive cross-sectoral policies that address issues of recruitment, pre-service and in-service training, retention, professional development, evaluation, employment and teaching conditions, as well as teacher status.
- School conditions should be enhanced by building more classrooms and improving the conditions of school buildings and infrastructure, including by prioritizing investment in head teachers and school administrators. Particular attention should be paid to providing sanitary and other facilities for girls, thus removing one of their key obstacles.

Stakeholders in education

- Governments bear the primary responsibility for providing an appropriate framework for realizing the right of everyone to education. Through innovative approaches, the private sector and civil society can assist in providing access to education for marginalized groups.
- There is need to engage the private sector to facilitate the transition from basic education, vocational training, higher education and non-formal education into the labour market.
- Quality, accountability and transparency should be promoted through better involvement of parents and communities in the running of schools.

* Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Palestine.

I. Introduction

1. In July 2011, the Economic and Social Council will hold its fifth annual ministerial review in Geneva. The review will focus on "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education".

2. On 9 December 2011, a regional preparatory meeting for the Arab region was hosted by the Qatar Foundation and the Government of Qatar, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

3. The meeting brought together a diverse group of regional stakeholders, experts from the United Nations system and other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector to discuss how innovative approaches, policies and targeted interventions can help to reach women, girls and the marginalized.

4. The meeting provided an important opportunity for the Arab countries to contribute to the annual ministerial review, including by sharing best practices and lessons learned.

II. Proceedings of the regional preparatory meeting

A. Opening session

5. In his welcome remarks, Saad Bin Ibrahim Al Mahmoud, Minister of Education and Higher Education of Qatar, outlined the rapid progress made by his country in reaching the education-related Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals. At the same time, he underscored that, for the region as a whole, the delivery of education to women, girls and marginalized groups remains a major challenge and should receive more attention and support. In particular, the exchange of expertise between countries needs to increase. Regional consultations such as the regional preparatory meetings for the annual ministerial review could help countries identify innovative, effective methods to deliver education to all, including to women, girls and marginalized groups in the Arab world. The Minister noted that the findings of the meeting will provide an important input into the upcoming session of the 2011 annual ministerial review.

6. Dr. Fathy Saoud, President of the Qatar Foundation, said that there are three main principles that guided programmes at the Qatar Foundation. First, all programmes should be of the highest quality. Second, they should be seen as a part of a continuum in a holistic system from basic to higher education, and from basic to funded research. Third, in today's knowledge economy, education becomes a key power in triggering social and economic change while preserving national identity, values and culture. Based on the three principles, Education for All is more important than ever. Innovative partnership models could also help an education model as well as cutting-edge research.

7. In his opening remarks, Hamidon Ali, President of the Economic and Social Council and Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, congratulated Qatar for being selected to host the 2022 World Cup football

tournament and underscored the important links between sports and education. He noted that the 2010 United Nations summit on the Millennium Development Goals in New York had reaffirmed the central role of education in achieving all of the Goals. However, local, national and international funding for education must become more reliable, and such funding must be supplemented by new innovative approaches involving civil society and the public sector. In regard to the special focus of the meeting on reaching women, girls and the marginalized in the Arab region, attention will have to be paid to non-formal approaches to education that promote quality and accountability through more extensive involvement of parents and communities.

8. In order to measure progress, enrolment ratios and out-of-school figures must be monitored to address the prominent regional variations, as well as the stark gender disparities in the Arab countries. Ambassador Ali remarked that despite serious challenges it should not be forgotten that considerable progress in advancing the quality of life has been realized, especially as regards women. He ended with a positive message, noting that in 2005 the average woman could expect to live one third longer than would have been likely in 1955, is less likely to suffer from disease and deprivation and much more likely to be literate and educated.

9. Thomas Stelzer, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said that education is arguably the most important building block in what economists call human capital. Nobel laureate Gary Becker rightly argued that education is an investment, no different from any other; put in too little and returns rarely satisfy. UNESCO, in its latest global education report, estimates that achieving the Millennium Development Goal of universal access to primary education in least developed countries by 2015 will require closing an annual financing gap of $16 billion. However, just as importantly, the money needs to be invested more effectively. As highlighted in a recent study by McKinsey, high spending alone will not ensure better learning outcomes. This finding is of particular relevance for the Arab region given that, despite high spending, learning outcomes remain poor in a number of countries. On the ground, more schools must be built and many new teachers hired. Arab States themselves are expected to account for around 15 per cent of total demand for new teachers. With regard to the theme of the meeting, Mr. Stelzer noted that globally two thirds of the world's illiterate are female and that of the millions of out-of-school children girls make up the majority. He said that getting more girls and other marginalized groups in Arab society into school will demand surmounting many economic, social, religious and political barriers. He concluded that, despite these challenges, the goal of truly universal primary education is within reach.

B. Panel discussion: Innovative approaches to reach women, girls and the marginalized in the Arab region

10. Abdel Moneim Osman, Director of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States and UNESCO Representative to Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, moderated the panel discussion. In his opening remarks he recalled that Arab women and girls are still facing major barriers in accessing quality education, which hampered their later participation in the labour market. Only 9 of 19 Arab countries have achieved gender parity in primary education.

Illiteracy among women and girls remains a major challenge, especially in rural areas. He asked the panellists to focus on two main issues. First, how the participation in and access of women, girls and the marginalized to education might be improved by employing innovative ideas to address the challenges Arab countries confront, including conflict, internal displacements, lack of facilities, high fertility rates and poverty. Second, how gender bias in education favouring boys might be removed through targeted interventions, for example, by setting up community centres that can reach women and girls in remote areas and ensure the availability of separate sanitary facilities for boys and girls.

11. Hassan Mneimneh, Minister of Education and Higher Education of Lebanon, noted the central role of education in reaching all Millennium Development Goals. He said that Lebanon considers education as the only way for the country to progress. While the first step is to ensure access to education for all, it is equally important that education should provide children with knowledge that enables them to successfully enter the job market. To ensure access for all, Lebanon has passed legislation making education compulsory up to the age of 15. In addition, Lebanon has made the development of teachers' skills and the design of incentives for delivering better quality teaching a priority. This focus on teachers is backed by recent research showing that good teachers are a more important determinant for students' learning achievements than the quality of school premises.

12. Yasar Jarrar, Partner in Advisory Services for PricewaterhouseCoopers in the Middle East, said that innovation can help address the many educational challenges of the Arab region. He said that, to date, innovators had received little support from Governments. Innovative solutions have emerged despite rather than because of Governments. He acknowledged the important role of Governments as guardians of the public value of education, but said that they should reach out to the private sector and civil society. These groups can help to provide education more efficiently by promoting social innovation from the ground up. Mr. Jarrar cited several examples of community-based innovative solutions, such as the E-University, which promoted female enrolment in Saudi Arabia and the "Education as cultural freedom and self-learning" (Centre for Education and Development of Rural Women), which has helped to promote gender equality. To more systematically promote such innovative solutions, Mr. Jarrar called on Governments to de-politicize education and to adopt laws and regulations that provide a framework that enables the private sector and philanthropists to be part of the solution.

13. Mohamed El Aziz Ben Achour, Director General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, stressed that a main reform trend in education towards more participation of women and more tolerance can only be achieved in close partnership with all ministries related to education. He also highlighted the need to address the large urban rural divide in terms of access to education. He identified teachers as the backbone of the educational process and said that more attention should be paid to training them. Education should equip students with life skills so that they can enter the working world with confidence. He also suggested that the values of quality education should be linked to cultural values and should include promotion of knowledge, tolerance and respect for others. For the realization of such an objective, he explained that the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization is responsible for the design and implementation of an effective education plan in the Arab world.

14. Shahinaz Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer of Education for Employment Foundation in Egypt, presented an innovative response to the large youth unemployment problem in the Arab region. She explained that a key element of the model of the Education for Employment Foundation, a non-profit foundation, is to engage the private sector at an early stage and to ensure that employers participate throughout the process. She outlined the different steps of the process. First, communication with the private sector has to be initiated and curricula must be designed to respond to its needs. Second, a transparent selection process of potential employees and individual education programmes are designed in close cooperation with future employers to teach employees missing skills. The main challenges are to convince the private sector to participate in the programme, retaining students and ensuring that candidates graduating from the programme find work with the private sector partner rather than with the public sector, which is perceived to offer greater job security.

15. Amin Amin, founder and Chief Executive Officer of Change Agent for Arab Development & Education Reform (CADER) in Jordan, presented the work of CADER, a public-private partnership started in 2004. The organization promotes human capacity-building and professional development for educators in the Arab world through a comprehensive six-month professional development programme. The programme is based on a change management methodology integrating ICT to promote the processes of teaching, learning and working. Mr. Amin emphasized that in order to be effective, solutions have to be tailored to local needs, be practical and incorporate awareness and beliefs in the need for change and development. In its teacher training programme, the organization aims to foster key skills such as leadership, communication, coaching, project management and training and facilitation. In Jordan, where CADER is based, specific innovative education programmes such as the "Education reform support programme" and the "Jordan schools project" have already been implemented. Additional projects in other Arab countries, including Palestine, Qatar and Yemen, are being organized demonstrating the scalability and sustainability of the programme.

16. In his concluding remarks, Abdel Moneim Osman noted that several speakers called for legislative reforms to promote social innovation through public-private partnerships. Panellists also identified the need to support innovation at the local level. Several speakers emphasized that more attention has to be paid to rural and urban differences in education since these are often masked when looking at average figures at the country level. The great potential of information and communications technologies in providing access to education for marginalized groups, including in remote areas, was highlighted. The need to strengthen the link between education and employment was also stressed. The involvement of employers in the formulation of curricula was mentioned as one way to ensure a smoother transition for youth into the labour market.

C. Ministerial luncheon

17. Saad Bin Ibrahim Al Mahmoud, Minister of Education and Higher Education of Qatar, delivered welcome remarks and highlighted the importance of the regional preparatory meeting for the annual ministerial review in providing a forum to exchange innovative ideas on how to promote education in the Arab region. He called on ministers and distinguished participants to deepen the discussions on

innovative approaches to reach women, girls and the marginalized at the upcoming 2011 annual ministerial review.

18. Fatima Mohammed Al Balooshi, Minister of Social Development of Bahrain, noted that since Governments are responsible for providing quality education, they need to find ways to make quality education accessible for all its citizens. This requires removing barriers that prevent marginalized groups from accessing education. Since most barriers are not limited to the field of education, what is needed is an integrated approach that addresses other economic, social and cultural barriers to education. Improving educational outcomes therefore requires an integrated approach that addresses the multiple barriers. Partnerships with the private sector or civil society can play a crucial role in building capacities and in working towards shared social progress. The three complementary instruments of microcredit, promotion of entrepreneurship and vocational training have to be more actively promoted to make education relevant for learners, as has been successfully used in the case of Bahrain.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

19. In his closing remarks, Thomas Stelzer, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, highlighted three key messages taken from the discussions. First, despite a mixed scorecard, the education-related Millennium Development Goals remain achievable in the Arab region. The positive spirit of the meeting and the "can do" mentality of participants were particularly encouraging in this regard. Second, he noted that participants agreed that there is a need to redouble efforts to improve the quality of education and to reach the most marginalized groups of society. Third, the meeting illustrated that while there are no ready-made solutions, there are valuable lessons that countries can learn from each other's experiences.

20. He noted that countries that adopted the following five policies had made particularly impressive progress: removal of financial barriers to education; increasing national and international funding for education; provision of gender-friendly basic services; eradication of gender stereotypes in curricula and teaching practices; and innovative use of information and communications technologies. Mr. Stelzer encouraged ministers and participants to remain engaged with the Economic and Social Council through to the ministerial review in July 2011 in Geneva, where Qatar will share the highlights of the discussions at the regional preparatory meeting with the Council.

Recommendations

- **Provide equitable educational and learning opportunities for women, girls and marginalized groups by removing economic, social and geographical barriers to education through inclusive education systems, as well as appropriate and targeted measures both outside and within the education sector.**
- **Ensure adequate national education budgets to address, inter alia, infrastructure, human resources, financial and administrative constraints.**

- **Provide adequate and predictable international support for education, including through new, voluntary and innovative approaches for financing education that should supplement, but not be a substitute for, traditional sources of finance, as well as through South-South cooperation, triangular cooperation and other forms of innovative partnerships.**
- **Redouble efforts to realize the right to education, including in emergency situations.**
- **Ensure quality education and reduce drop-out, repetition and failure rates by establishing child-friendly schools with relevant curricula, active and cooperative pedagogic approaches and learning and teaching materials.**
- **Harness the capabilities of information and communications technology, in particular for people outside the formal education system and for lifelong learning.**
- **Increase the number of teachers and enhance the quality of their teaching through comprehensive cross-sectoral policies that address issues of recruitment, pre-service and in-service training, retention, professional development, evaluation, employment and teaching conditions as well as teacher status.**
- **Improve school conditions by building more classrooms and improving the conditions of school buildings and infrastructure, including by prioritizing investment in head teachers and school administrators. Particular attention should be paid to providing sanitary and other facilities for girls, thus removing one of their key obstacles.**
- **Recognize that Governments bear the primary responsibility for providing an appropriate framework for realizing the right to education.**
- **Engage the private sector and civil society organizations to assist Governments in providing access to quality education to the marginalized.**
- **Involve the private sector in developing educational programmes.**
- **Promote quality, accountability and transparency through better involvement of parents and communities in the running of schools.**